

# Supplemental Information on the Embargo of 1807

A case study of Rhode Island shows the embargo devastated shipping-related industries, wrecked existing markets, and caused an increase in opposition to the Democratic-Republican Party. Smuggling was widely endorsed by the public, which viewed the embargo as a violation of their rights. Public outcry continued, helping the Federalists regain control of the state government in 1808-09. The case is a rare example of American national foreign policy altering local patterns of political allegiance. Despite its unpopular nature, the Embargo Act did have some limited, unintended benefits, especially as it drove capital and labor into New England textile and other manufacturing industries, lessening America's reliance on the British.

In Vermont, the embargo was doomed to failure on the Lake Champlain-Richelieu River water route because of Vermont's dependence on a Canadian outlet for produce. At St. John, Lower Canada, £140,000 worth of goods smuggled by water were recorded there in 1808 - a 31% increase over 1807. Shipments of ashes (used to make soap) nearly doubled to £54,000, but lumber dropped 23% to £11,200. Manufactured goods, which had expanded to £50,000 since Jay's Treaty of 1795, fell over 20%, especially articles made near Tidewater. Newspapers and manuscripts recorded more lake activity than usual, despite the theoretical reduction in shipping that should accompany an embargo. The smuggling was not restricted to water routes, as herds were readily driven across the uncontrollable land border. Southbound commerce gained two-thirds overall, but furs dropped a third. Customs officials maintained a stance of vigorous enforcement throughout and Gallatin's Enforcement Act (1809) was a party issue. Many Vermonters preferred the embargo's exciting game of revenueurs versus smugglers, bringing high profits, versus mundane, low-profit normal trade.

The New England merchants who evaded the embargo were imaginative, daring, and versatile. Historian Gordinier (2001) examines how the merchants of New London, Connecticut, organized and managed the cargoes purchased and sold, and the vessels used during the years before, during, and after the embargo. Trade routes and cargoes, both foreign and domestic, along with the vessel types, and the ways their ownership and management were organized show the merchants of southeastern Connecticut evinced versatility in the face of crisis.

The Embargo was in fact hurting the United States as much as Britain or France. Britain, expecting to suffer most from the American regulations, built up a new South American market for its exports, and the British shipowners were pleased that American competition had been removed by the action of the U.S. government.

Jefferson placed himself in a strange position with his Embargo policy. Though he had so frequently and eloquently argued for as little government intervention as possible, he now found himself assuming extraordinary powers in an attempt to enforce his policy. The presidential election of 1808, in which James Madison defeated Charles Pinckney, showed that the Federalists were regaining strength, and helped to convince Jefferson and Madison that the Embargo would have to be removed.

Shortly before leaving office, in March 1809, Jefferson signed the repeal of the failed Embargo. In its place the Nonintercourse Act, was enacted, on March 1, which opened American trade with all countries except Britain, France, and their possessions. Madison was given the power to suspend nonintercourse with either Britain or France should one of these countries remove her regulations against American commerce. The Nonintercourse Act proved no more effective than the Embargo, and it proved impossible to prevent American vessels from trading with the European belligerents once they had left American ports.

Despite its unpopular nature, the Embargo Act did have some limited, unintended benefits, especially as entrepreneurs and workers responded by bringing in fresh capital and labor into New England textile and other manufacturing industries, lessening America's reliance on the British merchants.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Embargo\\_Act\\_of\\_1807](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Embargo_Act_of_1807)

The embargo was an unpopular and costly failure. It hurt the American economy far more than the British or French, and resulted in widespread smuggling. Exports fell from \$108 million in 1807 to just \$22 million in 1808. Farm prices fell sharply. Shippers also suffered. Harbors filled with idle ships and nearly 30,000 sailors found themselves jobless.

[http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook.cfm?smtID=2&psid=2986](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=2&psid=2986)

Smuggling along the northern border continued, and American ships and vessels began to engage in an illicit trade with British ships off the Atlantic coast, often with the active assistance and participation of the British navy. One of the most notorious smuggling routes was Lake Champlain. New Yorkers and Vermonters openly transported products on large rafts and boats across to Canada. Jefferson and Gallatin soon realized that if the embargo were to be successful, a strict enforcement act was going to be necessary. Congress passed the Fourth Embargo Act, also known as the Enforcement Act, in late April 1808.

<http://www.presidentprofiles.com/Washington-Johnson/Thomas-Jefferson-Embargo-of-1807-1809.html>

Under its terms (the Embargo), no ship or coasting vessel could depart for a port or district *adjacent to foreign territory* without the express permission of the president; collectors in districts *adjacent to foreign territory* could seize merchandise on shore they suspected was intended for eventual export and detain it until the owner would pay a bond guaranteeing that it would be transported to a domestic port; federal revenue cutters and naval vessels could stop, search, and bring back to port any American ship on mere suspicion that it might be carrying goods for export; and collectors could detain suspicious vessels in harbor until the president personally sanctioned their release. In authorizing searches, seizures, and detentions of ships and merchandise, the law made no mention of such constitutional requirements as search warrants and judicial due process. Yet despite this new measure, smuggling and illicit trading continued.

To enforce the embargo against a recalcitrant public, Jefferson early on resorted to regular army and navy forces to assist the customs service. The First Embargo Act authorized the navy to interdict oceangoing vessels headed for foreign ports. Without legislative authority, Jefferson, in February 1808, directed Secretary of the Navy Robert Smith to send naval gunboats to intercept American merchantmen trading with the British off the Delaware coast. The Enforcement Act authorized naval vessels to stop, search, and detain any ship or boat suspected of engaging in unlawful commerce, whether at sea, along the coast, sailing an inland waterway, or still in harbor. In July, Jefferson directed Smith to place his ships at the disposal of Secretary of Treasury Gallatin, whom Jefferson had made the chief enforcement officer for the embargo.

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Thus, by late summer of 1808, revenue cutters, naval gunboats, brigs, and frigates were patrolling the Atlantic coastline as well as every harbor, bay, inlet, inland waterway, and, bordering Canada, lakes Ontario and Champlain. In July, Jefferson ordered Secretary of War Henry Dearborn to send regular army units to the Lake Champlain area to assist the local militia in interdicting smuggling. In August, after Governor Daniel Tompkins of New York ordered 500 state militia to his northern border, Jefferson ordered Dearborn to station regulars in upper New York at key points along Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. Thus, by the late summer of 1808, Jefferson had deployed a military and naval cordon around the United States from Lake Ontario in the north to New Orleans in the south.

However, widespread and systematic evasions of the law continued into the fall, and Jefferson and Gallatin decided that an even more rigorous enforcement measure was needed. In early January 1809, Congress passed the Second Enforcement Act. It gave the president and anyone under his authority (collectors, federal marshals) the authority to employ the army and naval forces of the United States to assist them in their duties whenever and wherever they thought it necessary. It also granted collectors and marshals even greater latitude in their searches, seizures, and detentions.

Federal officers were now authorized to search any vehicles of transportation or warehouses and to seize and hold specie or other articles of domestic growth, produce, or manufacture which they suspected were intended for export at any port or location in the Union, not just at ports or locations adjacent to foreign territory. To obtain their release, owners had to give bonds to the full value of the articles. Coasting vessels now had to give bonds amounting to six times the value of the vessel and cargo. Once again, Jefferson, his administration, and the Republican-controlled Congress ignored the protections afforded by the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Amendments to the Constitution.

<http://mises.org/daily/4478/Jeffersons-Disastrous-Embargo>

## **Political Cartoon Interpretations**

1. “Ograbme” (Snapping Turtle)
  - a. Dambargo
  - b. Go Bar ‘Em
  - c. Mob Rage
  
2. T. JEFFERSON CARTOON, 1809. **‘Intercourse or Impartial Dealings.’**
  - a. An American cartoon of 1809 by “Peter Pencil” showing President Thomas Jefferson being robbed by England (King George) and Napoleon as a result of Jefferson’s embargo policy. -
  - b. President Jefferson is being held up for money by Napoleon and King George. Critics of Jefferson believed that he had paid too much for Louisiana and was prepared to pay too much for the Floridas. This cartoon also satirizes the failure of Jefferson's use of the embargo and restrictions on trade as a curb on French and British depredations of American shipping.

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/images/vc199.jpg>